

## PUBLIC LECTURE

# The military chaplain: An inherently ambiguous role



RELIGION AND SOCIETY  
RESEARCH CENTRE

### Speaker

Professor Grace Davie  
University of Exeter

### Date and Time

25 March, 2015  
1:30 pm – 3:30 pm

### Venue

Bankstown Campus  
Building 23.G.40



### RSVP

[SSAP-Research@uws.edu.au](mailto:SSAP-Research@uws.edu.au)  
by 16<sup>th</sup> March, 2015

### Abstract

This lecture explores the inherent ambiguity in the role of the military chaplain. It will do this in three ways. The first relates to the extent of religiousness among those serving in World War One, a discussion that reflects in turn broader and at times conflicting narratives about the process of secularization and the place of war in this. The second considers the role of the chaplain in terms of the two institutions which he or she serves. As David Martin writes: the military chaplain is 'doubly commissioned by Church and State' (1997:149). It follows that the 'angle of eschatological tension' in which a chaplain stands is particularly sharp. There is an inevitable friction between total obedience to the military and proper obedience to God. This is related to a third point: the tension between the pastoral and prophetic role. Chaplains are there to serve people in the circumstances in which they are caught up, including armed conflict. Few would dispute this. The question of 'morale' (itself related to 'moral') is rather more intractable. If chaplains are enjoined or feel called to sustain morale, are they effectively participating in the military effort – in the sense that they are enhancing the

capacity of a unit that sooner or later will be involved in the use of lethal force?

### Biography

Grace Davie began her sociological career with an undergraduate degree in Sociology at Exeter; this was followed by a doctorate at the London School of Economics. It was at this stage that she developed the two aspects of her work which were to endure throughout: an interest in the sociology of religion and an acquaintance with both France and French sociology. Her doctoral thesis on the political aspects of the French Protestant community in the interwar period brought these together.

After a break from academic life when her children were small, she returned to the Department of Sociology in Exeter where she has taught a wide variety of both undergraduate and postgraduate modules. Grace was also involved with the Socrates-Erasmus Exchange Program at both Department and School level. From 2002-06 she was the Director of Exeter's Centre for European Studies. Post-graduate supervision has formed an important part of her work both in Exeter and elsewhere.

During her time at Exeter, Grace has enjoyed close collaboration with and visits to a number of European Universities and Grandes Ecoles, notably the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes and the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris. In 2000-01, she held the Kerstin Hesselgren Professorship at Uppsala University, where she returned in 2006-07 and again in 2010 and 2012. The 2006-07 visit also included a month at the Collegium for Advanced Studies at the University of Helsinki. In 2005, she spent the fall semester at Hartford Seminary in Connecticut.

**This Public Lecture is an Open and Free Event**